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ABSTRACT

The changes that small liberal arts colleges have undergone are discussed in this monograph in terms of their past, present, and future roles in society. The first section looks at these colleges in the colonial context and shows how they were altered by specialization, secularization, the rise of science and empirical research, and by an increasing stress on the vocational intent of higher education. The second section defines the population of small, private, less selective liberal arts colleges by drawing on the Carnegie Classification system. The third section develops a profile of these colleges. The fiscal crisis is discussed in the fourth section, using extensive literature on the financing of higher education. The fifth section develops a picture of the contribution these colleges have made to American higher education, and illustrates these contributions with some brief notes on the current activities of several small, private liberal arts colleges. Finally, the condition of these colleges is examined in the context of possible or necessary action by the institution, the state, and the federal government. (Author/ SPG)

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# Small Liberal Arts Colleges: Diversity at the Crossroads?

Richard W Jonsen

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## Foreword

Prior to 1862 the overwhelming majority of institutions of higher education were struck from the same mold. They were privately controlled, small in size, rural in location, their curriculum centered on the classics and moral development, and their purpose was to educate the clergy and a small number of the elite. Higher education as we know it today would have been incomprehensible a century ago because the purposes of a "higher" education have changed. Today the overwhelming majority of higher education institutions are publicly controlled, gigantic in size, urban in location, their curriculum centers on the scientific and the applied, and their purpose is to educate the masses.

Yet in spite of this change, or maybe because of it, there is a desire to preserve the small remaining vestige of the past. The basis for this is not a case of nostalgia but a sincere belief that the educational emphasis of the past, as embodied in the small liberal arts colleges, produces a diversity in our education system that is an inseparable part of its strong foundation. This "sanctity of diversity" is evident in efforts to promote public funding of *all* of higher education while preserving academic autonomy.

The question that must be asked is: Is the support for the small liberal arts college based on diversity's sake or on some demonstrable facts that imply the small liberal arts college offers an atmosphere and educational programs that are important to our society and not available in the larger and more economically efficient institutions?

Richard W. Jonsen, senior staff associate at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, presents a needed review of the state of the small liberal arts colleges. His examination of the literature on their impact on their students versus students attending the larger public institutions, their actual curriculum and the composition of their student body versus perceived notions, and their financial stability helps to develop a more concrete and unified basis for judging their role in our higher education system. Dr. Jonsen's evaluation of their future is not overly optimistic; however, his review offers data that can help others better perceive their strengths and provide a sound basis for altering their current institutional direction.

Jonathan D. Fife, Director
ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education

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## Overview

Concern is frequently expressed about the ability of the small, private, liberal arts college to survive. Like the family farm, these colleges appeal powerfully to values that are imbedded in American history and tradition. This paper provides a framework for understanding the changes these colleges have undergone in light of their past, present, and future roles in our society.

The first section looks at these colleges in the colonial context and shows how they were altered by specialization, secularization, the rise of science and empirical research, and by an increasing stress on the vocational intent of higher education. Although the original purpose of small liberal arts colleges was profoundly changed by such influences, many of their qualities are perpetuated in similar colleges today.

The second section defines the population of small, private, less selective liberal arts colleges by drawing on the Carnegie Classification system, which has certain shortcomings when applied to such colleges.

The third section develops a profile of these colleges. There is no "typical" small liberal arts college. There are some reasonably generalized characteristics, and advantages and disadvantages associated with each. Because they are small, the potential for supportive human community exists; but smallness appears related to decreased retention rates. Many of these colleges emphasize vocational relevance in the curriculum; however, it is not clear that the change to a more pragmatic curriculum has been accompanied by clear, systematic, and tough-minded planning or rethinking of institutional purpose.

The fiscal crisis is discussed in the fourth section, using the extensive literature on the financing of higher education that has been developed in recent years. No simple conclusion is possible: there are signs of current weakness and those who predict future distress, but there is also a generalized stability among private institutions. The special vulnerability of the small college is clear, and that vulnerability, in part determined by tuition dependence, will be accentuated as demographic trends make enrollment stability harder to achieve.

The fifth section develops a picture of the contribution these colleges have made to American higher education, and illustrates these contributions with some brief notes on the current activities of several small, private liberal arts colleges.

Finally, the condition of these colleges is discussed in the context of possible or necessary action by the institution, the state, and the federal government. Many small, private liberal arts colleges have demonstrated their vitality and adaptability to changed conditions in the higher education environment. Leaders of such colleges, many of whom have proven to be clear-thinking and decisive, need to adjust institutional missions, when that is the chosen course, with courage and clarity. But institutional leadership may not be sufficient for survival. These colleges need to compete with the public sector for students who continue to demonstrate their willingness to attend such schools. Improved financial aid programs are a key to creating equitable conditions. Even under such conditions, small colleges may continue to fail. A governmental strategy emphasizes opportunity and choice, through the operation of a "fair" market in higher education, institutions who still cannot survive when market conditions are reasonably fair should not be artificially sustained.

## Historical Background

The small, private liberal arts college is a unique American institution, shaped by opportunities and pressures imbedded in the historical experience of this country. The small liberal arts college *was* American higher education for more than two centuries, from the founding of Harvard (1636), until the Morrill Land Grant Act (1862). The rise of the American university occurred just before the close of the nineteenth century.[1]

This section provides a very brief review of the role played by the small liberal arts college in the development of American higher education, the societal changes that influenced the development of newer kinds of institutions, and, finally, the way in which the small liberal arts colleges have adjusted to those same societal forces, bringing about changes in themselves, as well as influencing the development of those other, more dominant institutional types.

Small liberal arts colleges still occupy a place in the complex "system" of American higher education. From the standpoint of quantity or influence, it is certainly not the dominant one. But they serve a clientele attracted to them by their particular values and characteristics.

The initial model for the American small college was based on the English residential colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. The collegiate model flourished because it was known to numbers of Americans who had experienced it, and because its residential setting was particularly appropriate to the religious motivations of its founders and supporters and to the geography of a continent with a heavily rural population and a rapidly expanding frontier.

The character of the small institutions, as they emerged in the United States, was profoundly influenced by religion and intellectual orthodoxy. The early liberal arts colleges were as much religious institutions as they were academic or intellectual ones. The motivation for the founding and maintenance of the colleges was that of preserving and nourishing religion through an educated clergy, and a literate and devout laity.

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[1] In addition to the works specifically cited in this first section background essay, I have drawn principally on Brubacher and Rudy (1968), Veysey (1965), and Stone (1974).

The controlling vision was of a single set of beliefs, Christian though not always sectarian, to which the claims of literature or an emerging science was subordinated. Orthodoxy of thought and behavior was always expected of both students and faculty. Academically, the religious mission of these colleges was expressed in a rigidly prescribed and sequential four-year pattern of studies based on traditional antecedents. Programs of study consisted primarily of language and literature, and later mathematics and natural philosophy or science. These were imparted chiefly through daily recitations. Notions of skeptical inquiry, empirical science, and the importance of practical or vocationally "useful" skill training were not welcomed, though in these began the branching and fragmentation of American higher education into its current and highly valued diversity.

The early college was exclusive, because its clientele was limited to an extremely small portion of the "college age" population. Entrance requirements included knowledge of classical languages. Though the colleges did produce men whose civic leadership demonstrated the value of higher education, college was not perceived as a requisite for such leadership or for professional work, except in the case of the clergy; and the high percentage of children of clergymen meant that their enrollment could hardly be considered economically upper class. Thus, the question of "egalitarian" versus "elitist" higher education is irrelevant. Early liberal arts colleges possessed *some* aspects of both characteristics.

In brief, then, the early liberal arts colleges (prior to about 1850) embraced orthodox and usually sectarian religious purposes; offered a rigidly prescribed curriculum; emphasized the unquestioned learning of a received intellectual tradition; resisted the "practical" and "useful" arts and sciences; and served a limited clientele.

Over time, however, these characteristics set them at odds with a society undergoing rapid changes in its patterns of demography, work, information, communication, and belief. From the standpoint of higher education, the more important societal forces were: the rise of science, increasing industrialization, the vocational utility of education, secularization, the increasing egalitarianism of education, and the increasing societal importance placed on higher education.

The rise of science and the ideal of empirical research imported from the German university were contributing to the emerging dominance of the university model. Industrialization and increasing emphasis on the vocational utility of education combined to influence

the emerging university, to inspire the land-grant movement, to encourage the development of powerful technical and technological institutions, and to cause a broad variety of types of colleges and universities to expand and emphasize the vocational aspects of their programs. Egalitarianism was a powerful motivator not only of the land-grant movement but also of the proliferation both of university-level public institutions and, later, of community colleges. That society perceived and approved higher education's responsiveness to these powerful forces is symbolized by the enormous outlay of funds, from both public and private sources, which eventually were made available to support this complex and impressive system of higher education. The increasing secularization of society had created tensions in the historically denominational institutions, causing many to become independent of church relationship, others to diffuse their traditional focus on religious purpose (cf. Veysey 1965, pp. 50-56). The broadening and intensification of societal approval of and dependence on higher education led not only to the development of new institutional forms (e.g., the community college), but also to constant pressure to "upgrade" institutions and enlarge their scope of functions.

The small liberal arts college was the dominant form of higher education for nearly two and a half centuries. As the center of gravity in higher education shifted to other kinds of institutions, the characteristics of the liberal arts college endured in its own direct descendants, as well as, to some extent, in the varieties of newer institutions. The most important of these characteristics were: belief in a perennial curriculum, concern for the individual student and his or her personal development, smallness, and value-orientation.

*Belief in a perennial curriculum*—Though in its "pure" form this may endure in only a small number of academically conservative institutions, such as St. John's College of Annapolis, Maryland, the idea of a unified and permanently appropriate curriculum exists with some force and shape in many institutions. The currents of discussion about general education, core curriculum, and even the contemporary interest in competency-based liberal education attest to the persistence of belief in the validity of a shared and common experience (Rudolph 1977, pp. 268-69).

*Concern for the individual student and emphasis on the developmental aspects of the college experience*—The American and British tradition of personal as well as academic development is a powerful and pervasive ideal in all American higher education. While this

dual purpose is not perfectly realized, it does enjoy support by the academy and its clientele.

*The attractiveness of smallness*—There has been inexorable movement toward larger institutions: in 1870, average institutional enrollment was 92 students; in 1900, 243; in 1940, 874; and, by 1971, 2,983 (Grant and Lind 1975, p. 84). But many small institutions have been able to survive in the face of competition with larger ones. And large institutions, both public and private, have become increasingly interested in measures they might take, such as the development of cluster colleges, to ameliorate the atmosphere of bigness.

*The value-orientation of the denominational institutions*—A religious and sometimes sectarian inspiration was present in the early history of many public institutions (cf. Brubacher and Rudy 1968, p. 155). But the divorce of religious identification from public higher education is now absolute, and many originally denominational institutions are no longer church-related. In many of these institutions the residue of that original religious emphasis exists in a concern for values and value inquiry.

Although the original concern of the American college for shaping the values of its students may have been a specifically religious activity, it is true now that a generalized impact of the college experience is value change. This occurs in all kinds of collegiate settings. These effects have been most recently reviewed by Bowen (1977, a, b, c). But the extensive literature on the impact of college on students does point to the peculiar efficacy of the small liberal arts college in this regard, as noted, for instance, by Feldman and Newcomb (1969):

> The conditions for campus wide impacts appear to have been most frequently provided in small residential four-year colleges. These conditions probably include relative homogeneity of both faculty and student body together with opportunity for continuing interaction, not exclusively formal, among students and between students and faculty (p. 331).

Consequently it is unfair to identify the value climate of an institution explicitly or exclusively with its denominationalism, or to explain the particular value impact of small liberal arts colleges in terms of their vestigal denominationalism. The point is simply that these institutions do have significant effects in this regard and their concern for both secular and religious values is an enduring aspect of their legacy to American higher education.

*Adaptation of the small liberal arts colleges to contemporary influences*—Under the dominant influence of the university model, the character of American higher education and the increasing strength

of the public sector has become diverse and diffuse, and the strongest trends have led *away* from the values of the traditional, small, private liberal arts college.

The small liberal arts colleges represent a diverse category of institutions within the diversity that characterizes American higher education.

These smaller private colleges have responded to societal forces as well as to specific pressures, trends, and factors within higher education in a variety of ways. Some of these forces were and are:

*The triumph of the elective system*—Charles Eliot of Harvard espoused the elective system at his presidential inaugural address in 1869 (Hofstadter and Smith 1961, p. 601) and by about 1910, it was commonplace. However, the movements of curricular emphasis are cyclic, and the liberal arts colleges have been slower than other types of institutions to relinquish the prescribed curriculum, although they have done so with alacrity in recent years (Blackburn and others 1976). Still, the concept of election and student choice has been a powerful influence on the program of the liberal arts college.

*The establishment of special-clientele liberal arts colleges*—To the identification of a clientele of a specific denomination was added the liberal arts colleges founded for blacks (by several denominations after the Civil War), and women (beginning in 1836 with the establishment of Wesleyan Female College of Macon, Georgia).

*The rise of vocationalism*—Liberal arts colleges, over a period of about seventy-five years (from about 1870), have become more specialized and more vocational in their curriculum (McGrath 1958).

> The fact is, however, that even those more conventional colleges, since the 1870's, have adopted, slowly at first, and then more rapidly, curricula with explicit vocational objectives. Before this date they exhibited considerable, though by no means absolute, uniformity of purpose. In contrast to the richness of their present offerings, they were established primarily to introduce the student to a rather limited, intensively studied body of subject matter, and, more particularly, to cultivate certain general qualities of mind and character . . . By 1957 . . . the professional, the technical, and the conventional liberal arts programs were invariably found on the same college campus and usually intermixed in the requirements for the degree. The statements of purposes of some institutions candidly reveal this change in policy. They declare that the college now offers complete programs leading to immediate gainful employment in specific occupations (pp. 4-7).

*Departmentalization*—Departmentalization, a concomitant of the university structure, has become pervasive in liberal arts colleges as in other institutions. Departmentalism increases specialization, and

may, by isolating specialists from each other, lead to an inability to integrate the liberal arts into a comprehensive curricular pattern.

*Secularization*—The most visible and affluent liberal arts colleges are nondenominational, although they were originally church-related institutions. This change may have been influenced by the secular tendencies of the two most powerful and successful movements in nineteenth century American higher education: the public land-grant college movement brought about by the Morrill Act of 1862 (cf. Brubacher and Rudy 1968, Chapter 8) and the university movement based on the German research university ideal of empirical inquiry not bound by religious or other preconceptions (cf. Veysey 1965, Chapter III). Rising concern after 1900 about the sensitive issue of academic freedom and religious belief may also have had an influence on the secularization of institutions (cf. Veysey 1965, p. 56). Furthermore, the Carnegie plan to pension retired professors put a great strain on denominational bonds because professors of denominational colleges were excluded from its largess. A number of these colleges tried to convince the fund that they were not really church-related, while others "were pulled loose from their denominational moorings by the magnet of the Carnegie pension system" (1968, p. 361).

*Competition from public institutions*—Undeniably, one of the major factors in shaping the contemporary small liberal arts college is that as public higher education became the dominant form of higher education in the United States (based on enrollment, this dominance occurred after 1950), the small private colleges found themselves competing with a range of public institutions. Their best students were prime candidates for the prestigious state universities; their "average" students were attracted to state colleges; and their academically weaker students were the natural clientele of the burgeoning community colleges. Much of the present activity in the small liberal arts colleges is attributable to this intense competition with public-supported institutions.

## Definition of the Population

The small, private, less-selective liberal arts colleges discussed in this paper are for practical purposes the private colleges in the Carnegie Commission's "Liberal Arts II" category (Carnegie Commission 1973). Recognizing the need for a classification system that would facilitate research and analysis, the Carnegie Commission developed a system that divides institutions of higher education into five categories:

1. Doctoral Granting Institutions
2. Comprehensive Universities and Colleges
3. Liberal Arts Colleges
4. Two-Year Colleges and Institutes
5. Professional Schools and Other Specialized Institutions

Each of these categories is subdivided into public and private institutions. Several of the categories are further divided; for instance, the Doctoral Granting Institutions are divided into four types: two classes of "research" universities, and two classes of "doctoral granting" institutions. The Liberal Arts category is divided into Liberal Arts Colleges I and II. Category I includes the more selective liberal arts colleges.[1] Category II includes all institutions which did not meet the selection criteria for Category I, and were not included in another category because of size and complexity.

This paper focuses on colleges in the category Liberal Arts Colleges II. By definition, these colleges are virtually all small, *relatively* unselective, and non-complex in structure. The category is almost synonymous with the 494 colleges that, because of their smallness, moderate selectivity, and relative obscurity, Astin has appropriately called "invisible" colleges (Astin 1972). The Carnegie classification category includes 547 such colleges.[2] There is extensive overlap be-

[1] "More selective" means those colleges that scored 5 or above on Astin's selectivity index, or were included among the 200 leading baccalaureate granting institutions in terms of numbers of their graduates receiving Ph.D.'s at 40 leading doctoral granting institutions from 1920 to 1966. The score of 5 or above on the selectivity index roughly corresponds to the equivalent mean scores on the SAT of above 1074, or above 24 on the ACT.

[2] Astin dropped one category lower to the cut-off level in terms of selectivity for his operational definition of "invisible" colleges (to below level 4, which means a maximum mean score on the SAT for *his* institutions of 997). He also excluded, irrespective of complexity, institutions with over 2,500 enrollment. He

tween the Carnegie category and Astin's "invisible colleges." These institutions, small, less selective, relatively obscure, are clearly vulnerable whatever they are called. As Astin points out, "of all the institutions of higher education, invisible colleges are the most likely to become extinct" (Astin 1972, p. 11).

The use of this category to "define" the small liberal arts colleges does involve several problems:

(1) It is a definition largely by exclusion. It tends to exclude larger institutions (over 1,500); it excludes selective institutions; and it excludes complex institutions.

(2) Use of the Carnegie list begs the question with respect to the *nature* of the small liberal arts college.

(3) The Carnegie technical paper blurs the distinction between liberal arts college and a comprehensive college (Carnegie Commission 1973, p. 3).

(4) Since the categories are defined in terms of size, selectivity, complexity, and function, the extent to which they distinguish among institutions in terms of purpose and outcome is somewhat limited.

In spite of these problems, the Carnegie list does use institutional characteristics of most interest to this study: smallness and nonselectivity. A review of the list itself will show that most of the institutions are identified by their present purpose, or origin stemming from the liberal arts tradition.

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*includes*, however, a number of institutions which, because of program complexity, Carnegie included in other categories than Liberal Arts Colleges II. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that there is not a one-for-one comparability with Astin's colleges and the Carnegie classification, which has formed the basic list of colleges examined in this paper. Carnegie's category includes many colleges that are more selective in their admissions than Astin's population. But its list seems to be a reliable, if not perfect, population of small liberal arts colleges. Nevertheless, much of the data used in this paper refers to the "invisible colleges" of Astin's study. The data must be interpreted with this in mind. Another attempt at categorization is that of the Academy for Educational Development (Irwin 1973); however this "taxonomy" rejects the factor of selectivity and depends largely on factors of size and complexity to determine institutions in the category of "General Baccalaureate Colleges." For purposes of this paper it is less useful than the Carnegie list.

## Profile of the Small, Private, Less Selective Liberal Arts College

This section draws together the distinguishing characteristics of the small liberal arts college. In comparing these colleges with other institutional types, a false impression of homogeneity may emerge. It should be noted that this group of colleges is not homogeneous with respect to geographical setting, student type, faculty quality, fiscal health, program, or environment.

*The Students*

Students attending the small liberal arts college tend to be local. Though the colleges themselves are mostly residential in character, a high percentage of students come from homes within fifty miles of the college, and a majority from within the state or region (Astin 1972, p. 50). In the small liberal arts colleges, a large percentage are from rural or farm backgrounds (an average of 11 percent, according to Astin's figures for the "invisible colleges," but ranging as high as 55 percent) (Astin 1972, p. 52). The Catholic and Protestant colleges are quite different in this respect. Data from *National Norms for Entering Freshmen* (Astin and others 1973, 1974) indicate that Catholic college freshmen include a disproportionally high concentration of students raised in large cities and their suburbs, while Protestant colleges include similarly high concentrations of students who were raised on farms or in small towns (see also El Khawas 1976, p. 24).

Students attending private institutions tend to come from more affluent families than students from public institutions, but this tendency is less pronounced among students from small private liberal arts colleges than other types.

Table 1 shows that small private liberal arts colleges enroll a smaller percentage of students from higher income families, and a larger percentage of students from lower income families than other types of four-year private institutions. They even enroll a higher proportion of students from lower-income families than do public doctoral institutions. Related to this, a high proportion of students from small liberal arts colleges (39.5 percent) are from families in which neither parent attended college (El Khawas 1976, p. 59).

The invisible colleges and the "elite" colleges by definition attract two separate types of academically oriented students. The elite col-

*Table 1. Parental Income*

| | % from families with incomes above $20,000 | % from families with incomes below $10,000 |
|---|---|---|
| **All Institutions** | | |
| Public | 27.2 | 26.1 |
| Private | 39.4 | 21.0 |
| **Doctoral** | | |
| Public | 35.3 | 17.3 |
| Private | 55.0 | 11.6 |
| **Comprehensive** | | |
| Public | 26.7 | 27.9 |
| Private | 41.4 | 17.2 |
| **Liberal Arts I** | | |
| Private | 49.1 | 15.7 |
| **Liberal Arts II** | | |
| Private | 30.8 | 27.6 |
| **Two-Year** | | |
| Public | 22.7 | 30.0 |
| Private | 26.8 | 29.6 |

Source: El Khawas 1976, p. 59

leges enroll a high concentration of students who had achieved "A" averages in secondary schools, whereas the invisible colleges enroll low proportions of such students (El Khawas 1976, p. 59). Modest achievement is accompanied by modest aspirations, and therefore fewer of the invisible college students aspire to the doctorate or to professional graduate study than do students from elite colleges (El Khawas 1976, p. 60).

The less impressive intellectual credentials are offset by some very impressive human credentials. Academic aspirations of students in small liberal arts colleges may be more modest than those of their peers at other kinds of institutions, but their ethical and human service aspirations are not. A higher proportion (72.3 percent) of these students consider "being helpful to others" very important in their career choice than is true of students in any other kinds of institutions, public or private. Generally, the "service" aspirations of students seem higher in private than public institutions, higher in smaller institutions than in larger ones, and higher in less selective institutions than in more selective ones (Astin and others 1977, pp. 76-88). This student characteristic complements faculty attitudes discussed below.

Astin (1972, p. 57) notes that the career choices of the invisible college students are much more pragmatic and vocationally oriented, and that they are less likely to aspire to high-level professional positions than the students from the elite colleges. This accounts for the heavy concentration of degrees awarded by the small liberal arts colleges in business and education and health-related (non-M.D.) fields—majors with immediate vocational payoff—as opposed to majors in the humanities of preprofessional majors leading to further study. In many of the small private liberal arts colleges, over half the bachelor's degrees are awarded in education and business (Watts 1975). In short, the invisible colleges deal with a different clientele than do the elite colleges; their students seem more pragmatic and less ambitious in their career plans.

In terms of family finances, the invisible college students somewhat resemble those in public community colleges, whereas in terms of academic achievement and aspirations, as well as career choice, they tend to resemble students in public four-year colleges (El Khawas 1976; Astin and others 1977). This substantiates the contention that the small liberal arts college is in direct competition for students with public four-year colleges *and* community colleges (Astin 1972, p. 85).

*Location*

The small liberal arts colleges tend to be rural; Astin points out that less than 20 percent of the invisible colleges are located in or near a major city (Astin 1972). Although represented in nearly all states, small liberal arts colleges tend to be concentrated in the Midwest and Southeast, with 28 percent of *all* small, private, less selective liberal arts colleges being located in the southeastern states (El Khawas 1976).

*The Faculty*

El Khawas cites data from a 1972-1973 ACE study of faculty that indicate 35.1 percent of faculty in small liberal arts colleges hold the doctorate or equivalent degree (El Khawas 1976, p. 56). While in many of these colleges a good many of the professional staff come from institutions of high quality, doctoral degrees are more often from second rank or regional universities. Often, the catalog lists "further graduate study" or "candidacy" in lieu of a doctorate. In the Catholic colleges the awarding institutions are frequently Catholic universities.[1]

[1] Evidence here is drawn from reviewing catalogs from about 100 small private liberal arts colleges

Based upon catalog review, it appears that adherence to the traditional model has also meant that little imagination has been employed in recruiting faculty from other than professional academic ranks. Where this is done, such appointments are frequently categorized as adjunct or part-time, and separated in the catalog listings from the regular faculty appointments. Small liberal arts colleges seem no more likely to "risk" the appointment of persons without doctoral study, without graduate study, or, indeed, without college degrees than do higher status institutions, even though, as Meeth (1975) points out, the assumptions governing this practice are questionable.

Certainly the competitive position of these colleges is complicated by low salaries. Many of the small private colleges are at or below the twentieth percentile of faculty pay in their respective ranks, falling below the top level of professorial salaries by as much as $8,000 (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 11, 1977). The difficulties of recruiting a professionally competent staff under such conditions are ameliorated by the current severely depressed job market for faculty and relative oversupply of Ph.D.'s.

It is evident that, in spite of the difficulties, some of the small liberal arts colleges, because of the attractiveness of atmosphere, religious affiliation, or other factors, recruit and retain remarkably talented and dedicated faculty. This may be so because of the high interest these faculty express in the personal development of students, an interest that may have greater latitude for expression in these colleges than elsewhere. Faculty at Liberal Arts II colleges agree that it is essential or very important for their institutions to

- Provide for the student's emotional development (61.5%)
- Foster deeper levels of student self-understanding (67.5%)
- Develop moral character (69.7%)
- Develop responsible citizens (78.5%)

These expressions are stronger than those found in any other types of institutions except for private two-year colleges, in the case of the latter two instances (El Khawas 1976, p. 64).

These developmental *interests* on the part of the faculty appear to complement developmental aspirations on the part of the students.

*The Environment*

A number of studies published within the past ten years have used socio-psychological techniques to investigate college environments and their relation to student characteristics (Stern 1970; Astin 1968, 1972, 1975; Pace 1972).

These studies must be interpreted cautiously and conservatively. They frequently represent information that was gathered from the mid-sixties through the early seventies in a context that was rapidly changing. Nevertheless, they provide a good deal of information about the small liberal arts colleges, and the quality and character of their academic life. The following are observations that concern environmental characteristics of small liberal arts colleges:

(1) These colleges have an atmosphere of cohesiveness and friendliness with close and informal contact among students, and between students and faculty. "Concern for the individual student" and identification with the college are social realities, not just catalog rhetoric. Pace observes that this is especially true of the strongly denominational colleges.

> The more firmly and zealously a college is related to a church, the more clearly it emerges as a distinctive environment. And this distinctiveness is defined by uniformly high scores on the characteristics labeled community, propriety and practicality (1972, p. 57).

(2) These are costs associated with these qualities. Cohesiveness seems negatively related to selectivity and intellectual climate.

> . . . (T)he implication is that there are other things considered more important at these (denominational) schools than academic success. The low intellectual factor scores indicate what these are: . . . organized group activities and a well-ordered academic community (Stern 1970, p. 78.)

Thus community may be achieved by devaluing academic achievement and competition. Also, the strong vocational climate of the small colleges may work against a highly intellectual atmosphere.

(3) In contrast,

> the independent liberal arts colleges tend to be characterized by a pronounced intellectual climate and an absence or deemphasis of many nonintellectual factors found in other schools (Stern 1970, p. 77).

Their students have higher achievement orientations, are most competitive and independent, academically able, and aggressive. They also display greater musical and artistic ability. They manifest weaker religious ties, and less decorous social behavior. These colleges appear *less* cohesive and friendly, substantiating the tendencies observed in the cast of the small liberal arts colleges, as well as the contrast between these two institutional types.

(4) The warmth and cohesiveness of the small liberal arts colleges does not carry over entirely into classroom relationships, where the "elite" colleges score much higher on "familiarity with the instructor" than the "invisible" colleges (who themselves are still high on this factor). This suggests that there is a good deal more social distance between student and faculty than among students, in spite of the friendliness of the atmosphere. There also appears to be less "structure" in the classroom of the elite colleges than in those of the invisible colleges (Astin 1972, p. 77).

(5) While size has favorable implications with respect to outcomes of the college experience, selectivity does not. "The cognitive skills of a student seem to develop at the same rate whatever the selectivity of the institution he attended" (Astin 1972, p. 83).

(6) Higher proportions of students in "invisible" colleges are dissatisfied with their experience. It is noteworthy that the highly selective private liberal arts colleges tend to have dropout rates at the end of the freshman year of 10 percent or less. In the small private liberal arts colleges, the typical rates are 20 to 30 percent, with some higher than that. In many cases, less than 50 percent persist to receive degrees. Whatever the complexity of this phenomenon, it does not seem an altogether favorable sign that the level of freshman dissatisfaction should typically be that high. Further, Astin (1975) has demonstrated that the very small colleges (below 500 enrollment) appear to have disproportionately high dropout rates. In a 1972 follow-up study of 1968 freshmen, 37.6 percent of students from "Liberal Arts I" colleges indicated they were "very satisfied with college" as against only 27.7 percent of those in "Liberal Arts II" colleges (El Khawas 1976, p. 64). These behavioral and attitudinal indicators of dissatisfaction are serious and tend to offset the positive qualities of these colleges.

*Program*

It is difficult to satisfactorily profile the programs of the small liberal arts college; they are diverse in structure, emphases, and curricular offerings. However, catalog descriptions, statistics about degrees granted, and program descriptions in handbooks and manuals do help form some distinctive impressions. Some of these follow:

(1) The traditional, highly-structured and prescribed liberal arts curriculum is for all practical purposes dead in these colleges (Brubacher 1977).

(2) In its place are found, typically, a traditional departmental major plus sets of distribution requirements, which specify numbers

of courses to be taken from area groupings in humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and the arts. (The evidence for this is found in catalogs of a sample of about 30 small liberal arts colleges from four different states: California, New York, Kentucky, Iowa.)

(3) Those majors, and the departmental structure it implies, appear to imitate the structural response to the specialization of knowledge developed in large university settings. For many reasons this structure is possibly unnecessary and perhaps even wrong in a small college environment. Among those reasons are:

(a) Departmentalization has apparently led to the creation of majors and degree programs regardless of student demand; in many of these colleges, there are at least a half-dozen disciplines that award one or two degrees per year (Barber and Wells 1975).

(b) Even where the department is justified by its service offerings, the existence of a major probably means the maintenance of undersubscribed upper-division courses. Secondly, departmentalization also creates pressures for the enlargement and elaboration of course offerings (aside from those needed for degree programs) to accommodate faculty specializations and interests.

(c) Related to these two problems, the strength of specialization inhibits cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary activity, thus working against an integrated approach to liberal or general education. For example, very few "interdisciplinary" degrees show up in the listing of degrees conferred by these institutions.

(d) The curricular emphasis in the small liberal arts college is not exclusively liberal arts. In fact, a high percentage of these colleges award the largest number of their degrees in education, with a strong representation in business and health-related fields, which suggests a vocationalism somewhat at odds with their popular image.

(e) There is conflicting evidence regarding significant curricular reform in these colleges. It is really impossible to satisfactorily gauge the extent of program of curricular redesign in small liberal arts colleges. There is evidence of considerable curricular "change" (Blackburn et al. 1976). But small liberal arts colleges seem to be underrepresented in nationally visible indicators of participation in pilot projects, such as Change in Liberal Education or Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grants for institutional renewal. They appear to be underrepresented in somewhat noncomprehensive listings of "innovation," such as *The Guide to Alternative Colleges and Universities* (Blaze et al. 1974). On the other hand, small liberal arts colleges are quite well-represented in

one purportedly comprehensive list of innovations, *The Yellow Pages of Undergraduate Innovations* (The Cornell Center for Improvement in Undergraduate Education, 1974). In that source they are represented in most innovations listed: independent study and student-designed courses and majors, new modes of evaluation, and new calendars. Though they appear to be underrepresented in hardware-oriented innovations (TV computers), they are well-represented in the development of career-oriented courses and programs, which indicates either the creation of new vocational programs (such as for "legal specialists") or the adaptation of existing programs to vocational purposes (health service analysis for majors in sociology). Small liberal arts colleges are developing entrepreneurial outreach to specific career groups under the inducement of federal or state grants (for instance, law enforcement programs).

These career-oriented initiatives and innovations are further illustration that a notable activity of the small liberal arts colleges, not wholly inconsistent with their own history, is the aggressive pursuit of a more specific vocational identification.

The fiscal resources needed for innovation are probably declining. Data from HEGIS (El Khawas 1976, p. 57 and Bowen and Minter 1976, p. 60) suggest that small liberal arts colleges are allocating *diminishing* proportions of institutional budgets to the core function of instruction and departmental research, which, whatever the advantage of this from a managerial viewpoint, probably means less money for curricular experimentation.

(f) It is impossible to estimate how widespread or vital these indications of institutional renewal are. For one thing, even if small liberal arts colleges are fairly well-represented compared to other kinds of colleges, it does appear that no group of colleges is remarkably or uniformly vigorous in adapting programs to clientele, interests, or technology. It hardly appears that the small liberal arts colleges are moving *as a group* to become more responsive, modern, career-relevant, or imaginative in their curricular structure or means of delivery or relationship to clientele. Of course, the ability of small colleges to mount sophisticated efforts to seek grants is limited, which partially explains their underrepresentation. Also, the appearance of such innovative activities may belie reality. A college catalog may state that a part of the student's self-education is the designing of his own program, and that the details of his program of study are arranged by him from semester to semester with the assistance of competent counselors; then go on to describe in another section

course requirements that are quite specific and restrictive. The rhetoric of program individuality and flexibility seems a good deal undermined by the reality of the requirements.

(g) It may be unimportant whether these "innovations" are internally motivated by hard-headed thinking about the mission of the institution, or externally motivated by the even harder realities of cash and clientele. The reality of the latter is that small colleges have fewer resources with which to make adjustments, compared to larger, more affluent, or more financially stable institutions. Thus, as demographic conditions become more difficult for higher education, the relative ability of small institutions to compete for students, dollars, and public attention will certainly decline. As the small colleges intensify their career-relatedness and broaden the scope of their clientele, they place themselves more and more directly in competition with institutions such as community colleges, which specialize in such programs and serve such clientele. Financial "returns" to college education continue to decline (as documented by Freeman 1976), and if this decline results in reduced confidence of students and their parents in the total value of a college education, these same students and parents may be less and less willing to pay the difference to attend the private replica of the less expensive public institution.

*Summary*

While there is no "typical" small, less selective, private liberal arts college, there are, in fact, some patterns that emerge from the preceding discussion, and which support the following observations about them.

1. Size is the most typical characteristic. These small colleges universally enjoy the benefits of smallness, which are cohesiveness, community, friendliness, and warmth.

2. In spite of this, they tend to suffer from somewhat higher dropout rates than private colleges as a whole.

3. They are typically rural and attract disproportionate numbers of rural students (though the Catholic colleges' locations and clientele are just the reverse—overrepresentation of urban students). This distinction typically breaks along Catholic-Protestant lines.

4. Because they are less selective, the cohesiveness and warmth gained because of smallness is traded off for climates weak in intellectual and academic aspiration.

5. Because of competitive disadvantage, faculties appear to possess less powerful academic preparation than other kinds of institutions,

but the selection process seems to value the traditional kinds of preparation, even if it involves less than doctoral level accomplishment at a regional university.

6. In spite of the liberal arts origin and commitment of these institutions, the vocational factor has typically existed alongside liberal education, and, as enrollment problems become acute, appears to be increasingly manifest.

7. In most institutions the pursuit of increasing career relevance does not seem to have stimulated interest in college-wide rethinking of the liberal arts and of their relationship to this career emphasis. There are notable exceptions to this general observation discussed in the penultimate chapter.

8. Their fiscal position is inherently weak—tuition charges are lower than at "elite" liberal arts colleges, endowments are small, and their church relationship is not accompanied by extensive church support. In many of these colleges fiscal realities are accompanied by a tendency toward internal inefficiency. Departmentalism has created a tendency to course proliferation and the offering of degrees in majors with extremely small demand (one or two graduates per year).

## The Fiscal Crisis: Some Complicating Factors[1]

During the decade of the 1960's—the golden age of American higher education—enrollment grew in both private and public institutions, disposable income continued to rise, and institutional expenditures, in both total and per student terms, grew substantially.

During the period 1967-72, when colleges were making major commitments to new students and new programs, they also began to feel the effects of several converging financial pressures. Early indications were masked by the attention given to student unrest but the signs were persistent. The slower rate of enrollment growth meant less rapid increases in tuition income to cover the burgeoning costs of financial aid and new programs. The rapid rise in faculty salaries during the 1960's (5 to 7 percent per year for the whole decade) became a difficult cost increase to absorb as tuition income leveled, other costs rose, endowment resources dipped, and direct federal funds either declined or failed to materialize.

Many institutions began running annual deficits, deferring needed maintenance, freezing faculty salaries, making across-the-board budget cuts, and allowing vacancies to remain unfilled as costs continued to rise faster than income. Studies began appearing in 1970 that documented the new era of financial distress. One of the earliest was Jenny and Wynn's *The Golden Years* (1970), which used longitudinal data for the period 1960-1968 from a sample of 48 private liberal arts colleges. While the authors found wide variations among individual institutions in their sample, they were able to extract the following general trends in income and expenditure flows in private four-year liberal arts colleges:

(1) In each year income exceeded expense by a small amount;

(2) During the period 1966-1968 the number of colleges showing a surplus on current accounts declined sharply;

(3) Simultaneously, the number of deficits increased and reached its maximum in 1968;

(4) Colleges appeared wedded to the status quo in the manner in which they allocated their scarce resources;

(5) Student aid expenditures were the fastest growing cost element for the institutions in this study.

[1] This section was prepared with the help of Gordon B. Van de Water, while a doctoral student at Syracuse University, to whom I am most grateful.

The remarkable growth of the 1960's documented in this study foreshadows the impending financial distress. Jenny and Wynn, in their follow-up study, *The Turning Point* (1972), confirmed their earlier suspicions that private liberal arts colleges might be in trouble: ". . . it is quite clear that the financial pinch *is not an isolated phenomenon and that it is not a minor problem*" (emphasis theirs) (p. 29).

The authors identify five factors that underlie the financial pinch: the decline in public confidence; a change in public and private priorities; accountability pressures; faculty power without responsibility; and the quality of management. To combat this situation, Jenny and Wynn prescribe "greater efficiency and increased productivity," primarily through "a moderate increase in the mean student-faculty ratio," and "a public effort to provide students generally with adequate funds to attend the college or university of their choice" (p. 63).

Cheit, in his report for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, sought to document the financial troubles of 41 colleges and universities (both public and private) (Cheit 1971). In assessing 41 institutions' financial condition, Cheit found 18 "headed for financial trouble," 11 "in financial difficulty," and 12 "not in financial trouble." Of the 14 liberal arts colleges included in the Cheit study, four were found to be not in financial difficulty, six were headed for financial difficulty, and four were in financial difficulty. Only the private universities, more affected by cutbacks in federal research grants and foundation support, presented a worse composite picture.

The source of private colleges' financial trouble is the growing gap between income and expenditures. Factors pushing expenditures higher each year include: (1) the effects of inflation; (2) rising faculty salaries; (3) campus disturbances, theft, and destruction of property; (4) rising student aid; and (5) growth in responsibilities, activities, and aspirations. Only the last two are amenable to substantial institutional control and they require hard decisions. Cheit, using his most conservative estimates, projects an increase in the rate of expenditure of 5.3 percent per student per year. More realistically, he expects a 6.4 percent per student per year growth

On the income side, private institutions receive about 96 percent of their resources from: tuition and fees (39 percent), the federal government (33 percent), gifts and grants (18 percent), and endowment income (6 percent). Cheit's projection is that private institutions "cannot expect income to grow even as much as 5 percent per student per year" (p. 115). The cost-income squeeze apparent here is the leading problem of private liberal arts colleges in the seventies. Cheit con-

cludes, "one thing all schools have in common is that they are likely to be in financial difficulty if the present trends continue" (p. 152).

While Cheit's approach can be faulted on several grounds—a non-statistical sample, imprecise definitions of financial distress criteria, noncomparability of institutional data, among others—it did serve to make the financial woes of private institutions generally known and to highlight general trends as well as indicate the need for better, more uniform information.

Appearing about the same time as the Cheit study was Jellema's *The Red and the Black* (1971), done for the Association of American Colleges. Jellema surveyed the entire membership of the AAC, which is composed of all but 29 of the private, four-year, accredited institutions of higher learning in America. The 1970 questionnaire was returned by over 75 percent of the membership ((554 institutions), thus making it the most broadly based of any study during this period. Additionally, the nonrespondent population was shown to be essentially similar to the responding institutions, so generalizations to all private, four-year, accredited institutions could validly be made.

Looking at the overall figures, the "average" (i.e., the statistical composite) institution showed a small surplus in fiscal 1968 and was running a deficit by the end of 1969. Patterns varied by regions of the country, but one "average" statistic was uniform—by June of 1970 the "average" institution in every region was "firmly in the red." Jellema goes on to emphasize that this is

> not a contrived "deficit," not an indirect student aid "deficit" (which all private institutions have been running for years), not the kind of "deficit" administrators sometimes submit to their boards to stimulate giving, not the "deficit" sometimes reported before annual gift money or contributed services provided by a religious order are included as income, but *an actual current fund deficit:* akin to the kind you and I have when our total account expenditures are larger than our total actual incomes (p. 5).

Jellema presents his statistics from a variety of perspectives, yet always comes to the same conclusion:

> Private colleges and universities are apprehensive and they have reason to be. Most colleges in the red are staying in the red and many are getting redder, while colleges in the black are generally growing grayer. Taken collectively, they will not long be able to serve higher education and the nation with strength unless significant aid is soon forthcoming (p. 28).

Jellema's follow-up study of one year later is even more pessimistic. The deficits it presented were, on average, higher than projected and

new projections assume even larger deficits. "The situation is getting worse, not better. For all of their brave talk, as a group they have not 'turned the corner'" (p. 17).

As a statistical portrait these two studies are much stronger than Cheit's study. The major drawback from a policy perspective is the use of localized projections of financial conditions. As with any projections, their reliability is suspect; but given the fact that local administrators made the projections based on current year experience, it is difficult to regard them as more than fears born of hard times, even when neatly cumulated and statistically manipulated. They do, however, reflect the gloom prevalent on many campuses in the early seventies.

In *From Red to Black?* (Jellema 1973), the book based on these studies, Jellema presents his data again and adds a current summative statement: ". . . while finances appear generally better in the short run, the prospects show no significant improvement in the long run" (p. 28). Cheit, in his own follow-up study two years later, found a "fragile stability" for the present but agreed with the more pessimistic long-range evaluation offered by Jellema (Cheit 1973).

Other studies[1] also added to the growing awareness that private colleges and universities were experiencing financial distress of varying severity; however, not all expert voices were of the same opinion. Brookings economist Alice Rivlin, summarizing her thinking for a Congressional subcommittee in 1971, said,

> My own impressions from available studies and conversations with higher educators is that there is no *general* crisis of higher education finance. Rather, there are several sets of factors affecting various kinds of institutions in various ways at the same time, some permanent and some temporary (Rivlin, p. 776).

While she lists the problems of private institutions, including "expensive commitments to scholarship programs" (p. 777), she concludes that "it is certainly not obvious that a program of general support for higher education is the appropriate answer to all or even most of these varied financial problems" (p. 777).

[1] See, for example, F. E. Balderston, "The Varieties of Financial Crisis," American Council on Education, 1971; Howard R. Bowen, *The Finance of Higher Education*, Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1968; Howard R. Bowen and Gordon K. Douglass, *Efficiency in Liberal Education*, The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1971; William G. Bowen, *The Economics of Major Private Universities*, Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1968; James C. Byrnes and A. Dale Tussing, "The 'Financial Crisis' in Higher Education," Syracuse University Research Corporation, December, 1971.

Columbia Research Associates, in their report prepared for the U.S. Office of Education, were even more blunt in their conclusion. For the period 1967-68 to 1969-70, they say,

> it is necessary to conclude that colleges' financial well-being has not significantly worsened . . . In summary, we cannot support the conclusions elsewhere [Jenny, Cheit, Jellema] that higher education in general is facing a discouragingly bleak financial future (pp. 33, 37).

They base this conclusion on their analysis of 50 predoctoral institutions for the period fall 1967 to spring 1970. They note that previous studies have shown wide differences in institutions' class sizes, student-teacher ratios, faculty teaching loads, and faculty salaries. The report suggests that these variations can be explained as a response by the individual institution to its "constituency," i.e., its own students, faculty, and administrators. High- vs. low-cost college constituencies must be taken into account before a judgment can be made as to whether or not an institution is operating efficiently.

Columbia Research Associates divide their sample into three subsets based on type of instruction offered:

> (1) "Academic institutions"—academic achievement is stressed and competition is severe; admissions are highly selective; individual attention, low student-faculty ratios, small class sizes, and low teaching loads prevail. These colleges are expensive.
>
> (2) "Utilitarian schools"—provide preprofessional training in areas such as engineering, technology, law, business administration and social work. These colleges are least expensive.
>
> (3) "General schools"—find their students among those who are not the best qualified academically and who are perhaps not ready to make a career commitment (p. 14).

While they carry these classifications through their report in all tables, the descriptive emphasis is largely on the more traditional divisions based on type of control—public, independent, religious.

The two major points of the report are that high costs may be unavoidable in some institutions and some statistical evidence exists to counterbalance the conclusions of Jenny, Cheit, and Jellema. Even so, the report does state that " 'independent' institutions as a group are evidently undergoing the most severe financial squeeze, with expenditures consistently expanding more rapidly than revenues" (p. 36).

The annual report on *Private Higher Education,* authored by Howard R. Bowen and John Minter and published in 1975, 1976,

and 1977, is similarly conservative in its judgment. The most recent (1977) report notes that in 1976-77 the private sector held its own in enrollment and admissions, the rise in faculty salaries nearly equalled the rise in the Consumer Price Index, the proliferation of curricula slowed somewhat, and financial indicators were generally stable. Though they recognize the possibility that this stability cannot be assured for the future, they conclude that, up till now, the private institutions have held their own.

> Their staying power has been due in part to the growing state and federal programs of aid to students and to institutions, to careful management, to the continuing support of friend and donor, to the evident fact that private colleges and universities continue to be attractive to millions of students perhaps most of all, and to the strong "will to live" that characterizes all colleges and universities (Minter and Bowen 1977, p. 67).

However, in the 1976 report of the 93 institutions studied, 20 (21 percent) were considered financially "weak," and of that 20, 14 were "Liberal Arts Colleges II." Thus 47 percent of such colleges are judged weak, as against 21 percent of the total sample. Further, while 21 (23 percent) institutions in the total sample are considered to be "losing ground," seven (23 percent) of the Liberal Arts II Colleges are in that category, with 14 more (47 percent) judged to be "holding ground" (Bowen and Minter 1976, p. 91).

On detailed analysis of the financial statements of these institutions the authors are disturbed to note the decreasing proportion of current expenditures devoted to instruction and departmental research, and libraries, and increased funding of administration and financial aid. They note the possibility that this implies erosion of academic strength.

Much less conservative in its conclusion is a report published recently in *Change* magazine (Lupton, Augenblick, Heyison 1976) that used 16 indicators of fiscal health and placed the majority (87 percent) of independent institutions in either "unhealthy" (27.1 percent) or "relatively unhealthy" (59.5 percent) categories. Only 3.4 percent were judged to be "healthy" or "relatively healthy." Problems inherent in this report, including its reliance upon HEGIS data, the small sample used in the factor analysis of the indicators, and general methodology used, do weaken confidence in its results. However, if the results have credibility with respect to *relationships* among institutions, it is disturbing to note that institutional health is inversely related to institutional size, and institutions of less than 1,000 are considered to be mostly (64 percent) unhealthy.

A study by the American Council on Education (Lanier and Anderson 1975) based on a large sample of public and private institutions concluded that "progressive deterioration has been occurring in the financial condition of higher education as a whole in recent years." After surveying a sample of 646 institutions (with a 78 percent response rate and 61 percent useable returns), the report's chief findings were that:

(1) a high percentage of both public and private institutions had "negative growth rates" in terms of constant dollar expenditures per FTE student. In 1974-75 no group of public and private institutions had median growth rates in Education and General expenditures per FTE student that exceeded the increase in the Consumer Price Index (p. 53);

(2) the private institutions have generally been harder hit than have the public institutions (in the period studied);

(3) because higher education is a labor intensive "industry" it cannot offset the effects of inflation with productivity increases;

(4) in the private sector, about one-third of all institutions reported deficits in current funds revenues for the years 1972-73, 1973-74, 1974-75, with a consistently higher proportion of institutions sustaining deficits among "Doctoral Universities I" and "Liberal Arts Colleges II."

The typical "student aid deficit" for private institutions in these years is a substantial share of the typical current operating deficit.

The National Commission on Financing Postsecondary Education (1973), established in part to clarify the fuzzy financial distress situation, concluded that:

> Based on the analysis of selected statistical evidence, the financial status of postsecondary education *enterprise* is not substantially jeopardizing the achievement of postsecondary objectives. Some postsecondary *institutions,* however, are already in financial distress, and, if present patterns and conditions of financing continue, there is a high probability that such distress will occur in several *sectors* of postsecondary education as well (p. 225).

These differences of opinion are generally based on the general perspective taken by the analyst. Depending on which institutions one uses and which financial statistics are extracted, a varying view of financial distress emerges. Even those who do not recognize a general "crisis," however, do see financial pressures as a growing problem, particularly in the private sector. Overall, these is enough evidence "to provide sufficient justification for genuine concern."

The special vulnerability of small institutions are a common thread running through all the studies of fiscal condition. The small private liberal arts colleges are not able to increase tuition revenues to stay abreast of inflation. The ACE study demonstrates that for 1973-74 and 1974-75, increases in tuition revenues lagged behind the consumer price increase and specialized index constructed for higher education (Lanier and Anderson 1975, pp. 24-26 and 43).

Small private liberal arts colleges, though their average tuition revenues are lower than those of other types of private institutions, appear to derive a high proportion of these revenues (about 10 percent) from tuition covered by unfunded financial aid that comes out of general operating revenues.

The very high reliance of small liberal arts colleges on tuition revenues, which are about two-thirds of Educational and General Revenues, makes them especially vulnerable when their enrollment declines. This fact takes on added significance in light of the typically low tuition charged by these institutions.

At the same time, their typically small endowments provide a thin cushion against external factors: those forces and events outside the campus and beyond the control of the institution, upon which the present "fragile stability" of institutional fiscal health will increasingly depend (Cheit 1973, p. 16).

Almost 40 percent of small private liberal arts colleges sustained operating deficits in 1972-73, 1973-74, and 1974-75, a somewhat higher proportion than private colleges generally (Lanier and Anderson 1975, p. 35).

In 1973, Jellema foresaw that an extraordinarily high proportion of the smallest (72 percent) and small (59 percent) institutions were likely to exhaust their liquid assets within ten years at the 1971 rate of deficit (Jellema 1973, p. 26).

*Summary*

The vulnerability of small private colleges is clear from their actual demise—they constitute the largest group of colleges that have actually closed in the last decade—as well as by the statistics provided in the studies reviewed here.

Thus, the weight of evidence indicates that private four-year liberal arts colleges have experienced considerable financial difficulty. Continued inflation, highlighted by soaring energy costs, continue to pressure these colleges. In an era of general economic slowdown it is doubtful if they will soon be rid of the necessity to watch their

expenditures closely while trying to maximize their resources without pricing themselves out of the market.

While the "crisis" atmosphere has abated recently, it has been replaced with the realization that steady financial pressure has become a part of the environment for private liberal arts colleges. How they cope with it will in large part determine their future place in the postsecondary education enterprise.

If conditions are now difficult for them, they will likely get worse. As we know, total enrollment in higher education is increasing at a much slower pace than during the past two decades. Degree credit enrollment is expected to decline in 1983 and *first-time* degree credit enrollment is expected to decline in 1980 (Simon and Frankel 1976). In fact, total enrollments for fall 1976, represent an 0.7 percent *decrease* from fall 1975 (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, Feb. 22, 1977), and the most current projections of the National Center for Educational Statistics expect a decline in total enrollment in higher education to occur in 1983 (Simon and Frankel 1976, p. 20).

The effects of these patterns on private colleges and universities are expected to be profound. The "interim Master Plan" of the New York State Regents (The University of the State of New York, 1974) points out that high school graduates in New York State will decline (from 1973 levels) 15.4 percent by 1985, and 31.3 percent by 1990. Predicting a period of "relative stability" for private institutions from 1974 to 1980, the report projects 1990 enrollments for private institutions in New York State at a low of 134,500 and a high of 151,600 (against actual 1973 enrollments of 169,900). Thus, within 15 years, the most optimistic projections indicate a decline of 11 percent, the pessimistic projection a decline of 22 percent. Looking at this phenomenon, Cartter (1976) observes that "it seems likely that the private sector may be most severely hit by the contraction in the size of the college-age group after 1980" (p. 71).

"Crisis of purpose" is a phrase that is fashionable, but probably accurate to describe one problem widely affecting the small liberal arts colleges. Quite illustrative of the ample literature that discusses this topic is a recent statement by McGrath (1975):

> If the colleges of liberal arts have the nerve to retrieve their independence and re-establish their traditional functions of preparing youth to live an informed life committed to personal and civil fulfillment, they can restore values to a central position in undergraduate education, and at the same time elevate the quality of our national life (p. 27).

The crisis is real, but the prescriptions are diverse, and agreement on them does not exist. Green (1975) has proposed a new interpreta-

tion of liberal learning, as a type of moral education related to the discovering of meaning in vocation.

> These observations suggest that the core of the new liberal learning is to be found in the social sciences and to some extent in those areas of knowledge directly related to the professions. Really good training in the social sciences permits people a kind of sixth sense of discernment which allows them to read the signs of the times—to sense the state of the world in which they are involved and then to select the places, the times and the means for action . . . It is a defect, however, that the social sciences are thus the core of liberal learning and at the heart of moral education. They have the capacity, at their best, to instruct us in the skills of action. But they are not evocative . . . For these reasons liberal learning requires those aspects of learning that are essentially literary, dramatic, symbolic and mythic (pp. 34-5).

If this is taken to suggest a way in which the liberal arts can be integrated with a "vocational" program, it may be a more realistic outlook than McGrath's, which appears to be a call to rediscover the "pure" liberal arts emphasis. The reality of the "crisis of purpose" is simply that the market for the traditional liberal arts approach is dwindling. If this can be called a crisis—the reality of shifting student interest, societal demands, disciplinary pursuits, and challenge to define the "outcomes" of liberal learning—then it is a crisis that sets a demanding and interesting task for the small liberal arts college.

## Observations on the Role and Contributions of the Small Liberal Arts Colleges

*The Historical Contribution*

The model of the colonial liberal arts college provided the foundation from which evolved most of the diverse models of colleges that comprise American higher education today. The structure, ideology, and purposes of the original small liberal arts colleges are reflected, to a greater or lesser extent, in the range of contemporary collegiate higher education: in technical institutions, community colleges, teachers colleges, state colleges, and land-grant institutions.

By examing how some of the characteristics of liberal arts colleges have been preserved or modified, we can get a clearer picture of the current role of these institutions and the contribution they make to American higher education. Six major characteristics of liberal arts colleges will be examined: (1) the balance among vocationalism, liberal studies, and research; (2) size; (3) access; (4) church-relatedness; (5) tax relief; and (6) models of excellence.

*Liberal Studies, Vocationalism, and Research*

The extent that higher education has always been "vocational" is often overlooked. Medieval institutions were, to a great extent, vocational, in the sense that they prepared students for the learned professions. The colonial colleges trained students for the ministry and their curriculum, an early and traditional kind of general education curriculum, was attuned to the needs of an educated ministry.

Many small private liberal arts colleges can be seen today as having a heavy emphasis upon "vocational" subjects—business, education, nursing and health-related professions, as well as undergraduate preparation for graduate professions such as law and medicine. But this represents no break with their tradition. This tendency has increased, and the drive of the liberal arts colleges to intensify and expand this vocational commitment so as to attract or maintain students has been widely noted (for example, McGrath 1958).

This vocationalism, or "utility" as Veysey (1963) calls it, has certainly affected the way in which liberal arts colleges have sought to transmit knowledge, and to provide opportunities for student development. Veysey uses the term "liberal culture" to connote an emphasis broader in scope than "liberal arts," whose power waned with the ascendancy of the university movement. In the age of the university,

the emphasis on scientific disciplines, pragmatic vocational study, and elective choice combined to destroy what had been perceived as a highly integrated and hierarchical liberal arts curriculum. No matter that this curriculum was also rigid and not subject to critical scrutiny; the partial and intermittent success of the "general education" movement to discover a contemporary replacement testifies to the monopoly that curriculum had on the collegiate goal of transmission of knowledge.

Other factors contributed to the inability of the classical curriculum to persist as well: departmentalization, specialization and the power of science, as well as the classical curriculum's evident intransigence towards the incorporation of new currents of thought (McLachlan 1974).

The disintegration of what had once been a clear, specific, and fixed approach to "liberal learning" was also hastened by the triumph of empirical research. There was a shift from a hierarchy of content areas to a hierarchy of *methodology*, with the "scientific" method having great status. Concomitantly, knowledge areas were democratized and disciplinary specialists developed who were only concerned with the specific matter of their subject. This concern with internal "disciplinary" development and dynamics instead of with establishing links among disciplines created a powerful barrier to integrating the liberal arts experience or educational experience in general within a common frame of reference. The ideal of empirical research, copied from the model in place at German universities, led quickly to specialization and departmentalization. Along with specialization came a climate of abstract investigation, "the liberation of intellect for its own sake." The ascendancy of scientific research as the norm in American higher education certainly weakened several of the most cherished values of the small liberal arts college: the research ideal works against a teaching emphasis; specialization, and its structural result, departmentalization, works against an integrated and wholistic approach to liberal learning; abstract investigation and scientific empiricism work against the traditional emphasis upon personal development and noncognitive growth. This is not to say that these dominant values are of themselves unhealthy, but that their powerful influence on the reward structure of the academy makes the pursuit of the traditional purposes of the liberal arts college difficult to accomplish.

Thus, while the purpose of research is tangential to the role of the small liberal arts colleges, these institutions have been profoundly affected by its pervasive influence in higher education.

*Size*

In 1974, 53 percent of American college and university students were enrolled in the 9 percent of American institutions that had enrollments of 10,000 students or more. Another 20 percent of the students attended moderately large institutions of from 5,000 to 9,999 enrollment. Although 23 percent of institutions of higher education had enrollments of 500 or less, they only enrolled about 1.3 percent of all students. An additional 4 percent of all students were enrolled in the 525 institutions (19 percent of all institutions) that enrolled from 500 to 999 students (Grant and Lind 1976, p. 98).

Since World War II, the trend has been to larger and larger institutions enrolling greater shares of the total college population. In fact, our society increasingly concentrates its functions in large institutions. In spite of this trend, small liberal arts colleges have been able to defend a niche in the institutional universe of American higher education. One reason that they have is that smallness, in itself, is a distinctive value with observable effects.

The size and frequently the setting of the small liberal arts college afford them unique opportunities. Empirical evidence bears out the conventional wisdom about small colleges: they are places of community, cohesiveness, friendliness, and cooperation (Astin and Lee 1972; Pace 1972). Chickering (1969, p. 190) has pointed out that studies suggest small institutional size is related to individual participation, involvement, and satisfaction; and that along with increased opportunities for these qualities may come increased competence, the development of confidence, and the development of integrity. Feldman and Newcomb observe that "the conditions for campus-wide impacts appear to have been most frequently provided in small, residential, four-year colleges" (1969, p. 331).

One aspect of personal development is socialization. Differential patterns of socialization are related to different kinds of educational institutions in the United States. Certainly the values and attitudes that the majority of students are socialized into at large research universities, technical institutes, and other relatively distinctive institutions are probably quite different from one another. Similarly, the socialization effects of small liberal arts colleges may be associated with their modal characteristics: denominational affiliation, rural location, local drawing power. There is the perhaps less tangible socialization effect of relative unselectiveness, and, in many cases, comparatively poorly paid faculties.

The same forces that promote growth (resulting from opportunities

for participation and satisfaction) may inhibit some kinds of growth as well as hinder socialization to certain aspects of the larger society. The function of socialization to adult life is certainly a role of the college. The small college provides an extremely supportive bridge to that subsequent environment.

Astin (1975) has demonstrated that below enrollments of 500, dropout rates tend to increase. In spite of interpersonal experience and opportunities, it seems doubtful that *very* small colleges can provide a range of academic, cultural, and recreational experiences to satisfy fairly diverse (and changing) interests.

*Access*

Whatever the unhealthy aspects of the proliferation of small liberal arts colleges in terms of excessive competition or marginal quality, the establishment of these colleges historically made a significant contribution to the provision of local access to higher education, and no doubt influenced contemporary thinking about geographic access and universal higher education opportunity. Philip Lindsley (president of the University of Nashville, 1837) observed: "Such institutions, scattered over the land, at convenient distances from each other, are better adapted to the habits, wants and circumstances of our widely dispersed and comparatively poor population" (Tewksbury 1976, p. 3). Greeley (1969) emphasizes the historic role of the Catholic colleges, whose location in large cities made them crucial in the acculturation and upward mobility of sons and daughters of many of the predominantly Catholic immigrant groups. Such groups may no longer need "their own" institutions to facilitate their social or economic mobility.[1] As colleges experience the diminution of their traditional clientele, many are reaching out to attract new kinds of students.

Colleges need to accommodate themselves to radical changes. (1) They have been traditionally used to full-time students of "typical" college age. Emerging "new" students are older adults with job and responsibilities that preclude full-time attendance. (2) The needs and interests of these students require a flexibility in the program that many liberal arts colleges are not accustomed to (as well as a vocational emphasis that many of them are accustomed to). (3) The traditional denominational emphasis may or may not prove hospitable to some kinds of "new students"—to ethnic minorities, for instance.

[1] The proportion of students in Catholic colleges who identify themselves as Catholics is declining, as is the proportion of students from Catholic colleges who graduated from Catholic high schools (Astin and others 1971, 1973, 1974, 1977; Watts 1975; Dillenbeck and Wetzel 1972).

(4) The "new students" whom Cross (1971) describes require educational resources, in terms of both money and human energy and competence, which the small liberal arts colleges may be unprepared to provide.

The location of many small liberal arts colleges provides an instrument for opportunity and access—in at least a few cases the only such instrument in a geographical area—that possesses immense potential to serve new clientele. In addition to the access provided by the location of the small liberal arts colleges and their special attractiveness to certain kinds of students, they have historically served many lower income students, and continue to do so.

In fall 1976, the median annual family income of entering freshmen in all institutions was about $16,500. For highly selective private universities and very-highly-selective, nonsectarian, liberal arts colleges, the median is approximately $28,000. But the median family income of students attending less-selective liberal arts colleges appears to be $18,000, or $10,000 per year less than that. About one-third of the students from the less-selective Protestant liberal arts colleges and one-quarter of the students from the less selective Catholic colleges have family incomes of less than $10,000 per year (Astin and others 1977).

The small liberal arts college is not the *central* institution in serving the purpose of the "enlargement of educational justice for the postsecondary age group," but it is certainly a contributor in this regard. Low selectivity, often perceived negatively, contributes to the egalitarianism of the system, and also insures opportunity for those students whose social and economic characteristics are related to poor performance on many standard indicators of academic achievement and promise.

*Denominational Affiliation*

Piety motivated the founding of our earliest colleges, but other purposes superseded piety: utility, egalitarianism, research, professional excellence. With the overshadowing of piety and traditional religion went an emphasis on character development, which was a legacy of the British college model. It may be that the church-related college had no special claim on these functions. Yet, they are part of its patrimony. Additionally, as Pace (1972) has argued, the colleges retaining the strongest religious ties also possess distinctive institutional character. This distinctive character tends also to be associated with smallness, since as an institution grows in size, it casts its net wider for a more diverse clientele and undertakes more diverse functions, thus blurring its focus.

While not all small private liberal arts colleges are denominational, it is striking that most, perhaps 90 percent, are. Among those, as Patillo and Mackenzie (1966) have demonstrated, is a great variety both in the strength of denominational affiliation and in the way in which that affiliation is manifested.

Even in some colleges that are no longer church-affiliated there is an expressed concern for values, commitments, and ethical quest that seems basically religious in motivation. Landrum Bolling, former President of Earlham College, illustrates this merging of religious emphasis with concern for character and values:

> Practically all of our private colleges and universities were founded by or are related to religious bodies. . . . It is exceedingly difficult these days to indoctrinate the young in any set of inherited dogmas or traditional moral codes. Hence, increasingly the church-related colleges become embarrassed or indifferent to their church sponsorships and related traditions. Such charges are inescapable. What is also inescapable, however, is a continuing and unfilled responsibility to speak to the need, often the desperate hunger of young people to find authentic values, true meaning, valid purposes, and fruitful relationships in their lives. . . . The mission of private and church-related colleges of the land will have to be restated in fresh terms for the age (Bolling 1970, p. 4).

This statement expresses both the religious tradition of the majority of the small liberal arts colleges and the fact that the residual heritage of this tradition in some institutions is an expressed emphasis on human development in a moral and ethical sense.

It should be noted that a tendency to preserve religious affiliation is associated with "invisibility" in Astin's sense. Invisible colleges are disproportionately religious; "elite" colleges are disproportionately secular (Astin 1972, p. 29).

The role of the formally religious institution is an important one in preserving the valued diversity of American higher education. [1]

*Tax Relief*

Private institutions of higher education frequently make the case that the existence of the private sector, with its expenses borne heavily by the student through tuition payments, and philanthropy through current gifts and endowment income, represent a form of relief to the taxpayer. Were it not for these institutions, presumably the students who now attend them would increase the demands placed on the pub-

[1] That role is jeopardized by the historical tendencies towards secularization, which have been discussed, as well as by the problem of governmental support that religious affiliation creates. Supreme Court decisions have reduced that problem, although the pattern of state aid in that context is complex. For an excellent discussion, see T. Michael Elliot et al. 1976.

lic sector, and consequently increase tax support for higher education. The consequent "savings" may be about 4.5 billion dollars (Education Commission of the States 1977 (b), p. 5). While the persuasiveness of this argument is diminished as declining enrollments under fixed costs permit *both* public and private institutions to absorb additional students at *lower marginal cost*, it is nonetheless a real contribution.

*Models of Excellence*

One of the difficulties of discussing the small liberal arts college is that the image conjured up is frequently wrong. It is the image of Swarthmore, Antioch, and Reed, colleges of a type that Clark (1970) has labeled distinctive. It is the image of Oberlin, Wheaton, Amherst, and Earlham, that Keeton selected as strong liberal arts colleges in his study *Struggle and Promise* (1969), or, later in *Models and Mavericks* (1971) the vignettes of excellent colleges: Mills, Sarah Lawrence, Bowdoin, and Knox.

These are not truly representative of the small private liberal arts college in the United States. They are for the most part highly selective, relatively affluent, and nationally visible enough to be assured of a pool of applicants sufficient to maintain a healthy enrollment. Their graduates frequently pursue graduate study in the "best" universities, thus assuring the college of a continued supply, through its alumni and the reputation they generate, of able and well-trained faculty from those universities.

The small, private, less-selective liberal arts colleges are just the opposite of this image. They are not very selective, are financially marginal, struggle to recruit an adequate pool of applicants who are usually from within the state or region. Sending few graduates to top universities for graduate study, they lack the automatic edge that affords in recruiting faculty from those institutions.

Yet there are models of excellence among these colleges. While they are not, in most cases, nationally visible, a problem created almost by definition for these colleges, they are exemplary in the lessons they provide for educational practice and organizational renewal.

At Davis and Elkins College, West Virginia, a community effort to change and become distinctive resulted in a report recommending comprehensive redesign of the college's program. These changes included the inauguration of four-year-long interdisciplinary problem-centered courses (on human freedom, the quest for creative life-style, emancipation of the modern mind, the future) as well as a new aca-

demic division to facilitate temporary experimental courses, and the extensive shift from lecture to seminar mode of instruction. These changes required a comprehensive program of faculty development, which has been carried out with external support (Jonsen and Broad 1975).

At a time when the relationship between work and education is becoming the central discussion in higher education, Warren Wilson College in North Carolina reminds us that since its founding, in 1894, it has had a program of mandatory work for all students. The meaningful aspect of this work is emphasized not only by important contribution to physical plant construction and maintenance, but also by the fact that it is evaluated, as is academic work, and sanctioned by removal from the program (involving loss of the work-related subsidy of student board-and-room charges). While the college admits to tension between the work and study, this model, along with those of other liberal arts colleges that have instituted such programs, provides one practical response to the serious involvement of the college student in productive labor (*Change*, V. 7, No. 7, 1975).

The College of St. Benedict in Minnesota was challenged by enrollment and faculty growth in the early 1970's to develop an extensive planning process whose nature and characteristics evolved over the next six years. A broadly participative process, but with direction from and involvement of top administrators and governing board members, the planning process is guided by a Planning and Budget Committee that annually: (1) evaluates the previous year's activities; (2) reviews the college's mission statement; (3) examines societal planning assumptions; (4) projects enrollments and resources; and (5) sets the upcoming budget.

Planning is comprehensive: it links the college tradition and history to its present functioning and resources, and proposes future activities and direction, in light of a changed environment. It has sharpened the college's understanding of its own mission, brought about institutional research relevant to planning and decisionmaking needs, and generated a vastly improved management information system. It has also led to procedures for improving the quality and the process of management at the college (Escher 1976).

The College of St. Rose in New York offers another illustration of a small liberal arts college that has made significant efforts to adapt both internally and externally. The college offers both an early-matriculation program for high school students wishing early entry to college, as well as a degree program for adults that provides credit for

professional experience. It has built special transfer arrangements with two-year colleges and proprietary and business schools. There is a cooperative work-study program with IRS, and government service internships. The college calendar has been changed to 4-1-4.[1] A variety of independent study and individualized opportunities exist, including a special studies major, which is student-determined, and an interdisciplinary major. The curriculum includes several team-taught, interdisciplinary and multimedia courses. To facilitate these changes, the college has an educational policies committee that monitors academic planning and innovative proposals (Cornell Center for Improvement in Undergraduate Education, 1974).

Ottawa University in Kansas has a program in which students draw up educational contracts with the help of an advising committee. An office of educational facilitation exists to do such advising and to aid in contract development for students, as well as to create and administer a network of educational opportunities. There is also a multidisciplinary center to study alternative models of academic organization and to support a curriculum that emphasizes individualized graduation contracts. Also in support of this approach, the University has initiated faculty development contracts, which are designed to develop faculty skills to meet the professional needs of this redesigned curriculum (Blaze et al. 1974).

Alverno College in Wisconsin has been a leader in the development of undergraduate "competency-based" curriculum. The liberal arts curriculum has been revised in such a way that the standards for earning a bachelor's degree are based on demonstrated competence rather than course accumulation. Alverno is seeking to integrate this purpose with the development at the same time of marketable skills in its graduates. There are eleven competency areas in the liberal arts program, and graduation requires the achievement of competency at a specified level (each area has six levels) in eight of these. Competency may be demonstrated by course completion or, in some cases, independent assessmen (*The Chronicle of Higher Education,* Feb. 3, 1975).

Until March of 1974 Marylhurst College in Portland, Oregon, had operated as a small liberal arts college for women. Faced with rapidly declining enrollment (from 815 in 1966 to 440 by fall 1973), largely empty dorms, and serious financial difficulties, the board voted to dissolve the corporation. This effectively turned the college back to its founding religious order, which immediately re-opened it as Maryl-

[1] Four-one-four is a recent and now widely adopted academic calendar in which two semesters of four months are interrupted by an intersemester of one month (typically January) that is used for intensive experience, frequently off campus.

hurst Education Center, a "college of lifelong learning" for adults. The move, accompanied by thoughtful planning, appears to have succeeded in educational and fiscal terms. A total of 506 persons are enrolled in the college's programs; about 300, the majority of whom are women (median age 37), are enrolled for credit, half of those in a designed degree program, half in individualized degree programs. The faculty is predominantly part-time. The college is currently developing an extensive support system for these activities, with the help of a $580,000 Kellogg grant, and is seeking to broaden its currently limited off-campus activities (Andrew and Friedman 1976; Monson 1978).

These examples are not meant to suggest a comprehensive review of the scope and functions of the group of colleges that they represent. They are indicative of vitality, leadership, and self-renewal, as well as of standards of excellence that are specific to institutional mission, location, and clientele.

In spite of these activities, many of these colleges are still in financial trouble. Renewal does not necessarily guarantee survival. Yet these examples demonstrate the ability of colleges, even with limited resources, to reach out to new clientele, and at the same time redesign programs to better serve "new" students as well as traditional ones. These and the many other examples of vitality and renewal among the small liberal arts colleges emphasize the fact that vigor and renewal is not necessarily a function of resources or visibility.

## Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

There is no doubt that the small private colleges have played a significant role in the history and current structure of American higher education. There is also no doubt that, of all institutional types, the small liberal arts colleges are most "at risk" in terms of survival (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1975, pp. 61 and 74).

Because of their size, many of these institutions are genuine communities. They make contributions to student development that are substantial and positive. Although this feature of the atmosphere of the small liberal arts college is unique to it, there is often a tradeoff with respect to intellectual atmosphere and student aspirations.

Geographic location of the liberal arts college provides a diversity of local higher education opportunity: for rural students in the case of those of Protestant affiliation; for urban students in the case of those of Catholic affiliation. In some cases, perhaps not many, the college may represent the only collegiate opportunity available in a given area, a fact not often recognized.

The religious affiliation of the majority of these colleges is a distinctive feature of the small liberal arts colleges. This is an aspect of diversity of American higher education that is valuable and important to preserve.

Because the colleges we have been discussing are less selective than the elite and visible liberal arts colleges, they offer equality of access to a wider range of students with respect to academic background. Because they are typically less expensive than the selective liberal arts colleges, opportunity is not as constrained by family income. Small liberal arts colleges frequently represent, for first-generation collegians, a supportive atmosphere to acquire the tools for upward mobility. Because of their size, religious affiliation, and proximity, they will frequently represent for such students a lesser break with home environment, and less traumatic socialization to adulthood than might occur in a larger institution.

The small private liberal arts colleges play a role that has made significant contributions historically, and currently represent a significant contribution to overall resources of postsecondary education, to access, choice, and diversity of educational opportunity.

*Governmental Policy: Federal*

At the federal level since 1965, and especially since the Education Amendments of 1972, emphasis has moved away from the encouragement and support of specific institutional programs in higher education to a primary concern with student access and choice. These policies are implemented largely through student aid programs. Except in the case of "developing institutions," where concern focuses on the traditionally Black colleges, the federal policy has not currently emphasized preserving or extending the current range of *institutional* opportunities through direct institutional support; however, student aid is of substantial indirect benefit to institutions.

Student aid programs, particularly the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant Program, are especially valuable to small liberal arts colleges because of their emphasis on lower income students (who enroll in small liberal arts colleges in larger proportions than in other private institutions), and because they "favor" moderate tuition institutions. Thus, larger percentages of students appear to take advantage of federal student aid programs at small liberal arts colleges than at many other kinds of institutions.

Since 1972, dollars have also gone to small liberal arts colleges through Title III. While there has been a certain emphasis on predominantly Black institutions, there are a number of other small liberal arts colleges among the 90 four-year private institutions who received Title III basic support in FY 1976 (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare/Office of Education 1976).

A strong case can also be made for the exemplary nature of project grants on a competitive basis, such as those made by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), some of which have stimulated significant renewal in small institutions.

However, the argument favoring federal direct support of small liberal arts colleges, admitting their vulnerability, is a weak one. The continued federal emphasis on student aid should be as welcome to the small colleges as to any group of institutions, given their greater dependence on tuition income than the elite liberal arts institutions, and their competition with the low-cost institution of the public sector. Student aid, therefore, benefits both student and institution, whereas institutional aid, while it may offer relief to the institution, does little to improve the overall functioning of the postsecondary market.

*Governmental Policy: States*

The state would seem to be a better locus of policy with respect to

the small liberal arts college. In fact, the number and variety of state programs that directly assist private institutions of higher education is impressive. Currently 43 states have such programs (Education Commission of the States, 1976; National Association of State Student Aid Programs, 1977). The mix of such programs, involving grants, loans, contracts with private institutions, facilities grants and loans, and direct institutional support, is extremely diverse. Student assistance programs are the most popular of these; 43 of the states having some form of state scholarship or grant program. In 1976-77, 1,095,300 students were aided by such programs, receiving $645.4 million in aid. This aid is beneficial to private institutions, whose students received 38 percent of the awards and 53.8 percent of the dollars (National Association of State Student Aid Programs 1976).

In spite of the existence of diverse state programs of support to private institutions, a consciously articulated state policy toward private higher education exists in very few states. This is unfortunate. The state is in a better position than the Federal Government to construct policies that recognize and respond to the specific needs, condition, and contribution of individual categories of institutions. State policies can be built on governmental objectives for postsecondary education, analysis of the way in which small private liberal arts colleges contribute to those goals, and understanding of the condition of those institutions. Such policies can also pay attention (though they seldom do) to the quality and outcomes of the institutions they support.

State policy may be so constructed as to distinguish between institutions on the basis of control and function, to support private institutions, and in some cases to support institutions with particular missions. The state is in a position, unlike the Federal Government, to make some judgments about the importance of such missions. While it cannot directly support sectarian purposes, a state can support the other missions that are related to the *size* of small liberal arts colleges: an environment in which community may flourish, and the provision of educational opportunity to students of moderate ability, aspiration, and limited geographic mobility. To do so indirectly through student aid reduces the greatest threat to the survival of such institutions: the inequitable price competition with public institutions. Under such conditions, whether or not a small college survived would be more a matter of the attractiveness of its programs, distinctive environment, and heritage rather than its cost. The ability of an undergraduate institution to maintain a student clientele is one evidence we have of its justification for existence. If students are not attracted,

it may have served a significant historical purpose, but is no longer an important resource within the system of higher education in its community or state. Further, basing such aid on demonstrated need reduces the risk that unresponsive institutions will be sustained (through institutional aid) or that institutions will be rewarded (through capitation grants) for serving as havens from public institutions and their low-income clientele for students from affluent families.

Thus, among existing alternatives, student aid policies seem most reasonable and beneficial. Enrollment in small private colleges is their most significant problem and is likely to intensify. Student aid improves the competitive ability of small liberal arts colleges. Packaging of federal and state aid forms enables these colleges to attract low-income students, for whom their unique environment may be significantly hospitable and growth-producing.

*Conclusions*

What can we conclude about the future for the small liberal arts colleges:

(1) There are likely to be many casualties among these institutions. [1]

(2) As the traditional college-age cohort shrinks, survival chances may not be in direct proportion to merit.

(3) While internal factors of fiscal management and intelligent program adaptation are important, it seems more likely that survival or demise will result from external factors: location (urban-rural because of population densities, state location because of policies of support).

(4) Colleges will also fail because they are private rather than public: private institutions require passivity to expire; public institutions require a planned and resolute political decision.

(5) Nevertheless, the demise of some institutions will not impoverish the system of postsecondary education. The passing of institutions that have a programmatic focus no longer urgently needed (e.g., teacher education) or that merely serve as a haven for students to es-

[1] Fadil (1977) has documented closings of 113 independent institutions between spring 1970 and fall 1976. Of these, 37 were specialized colleges, 37 were two-year colleges, and 39 were four-year colleges (p. 3). The aggregate enrollment represented by these colleges was small: only 15 of them has enrollments of more than 500 at the date of closing. Moreover, the circumstances surrounding the demise of liberal arts colleges in this period do not point to external factors (such as declining college-age population or increased competition from public institutions) as inexorable contributors to the closings (Andrew and Freeman 1976). The recent past is an inadequate guide to the future, however, and the impact on these colleges by college-age population declines has been pessimistically suggested by Froomkin (1976) and Cartter (1976), among others.

cape the more heterogeneous environment of lower-cost public institutions will be not widely lamented.

(6) It follows that government policy that seeks to maintain the existence of these institutions, or provide artificial resuscitation, is ill-advised.

(7) While tax money should not be used to maintain institutions (whether private or public) for which demand no longer exists, it is still true that government expenditures in such areas as student financial aid benefit independent institutions generally, and pay off especially well in small liberal arts colleges. Many of these institutions produce student satisfaction and value added at little governmental expense. Because they are lower tuition institutions, they consume less per-student student aid expenditure and combine them with private funds.

*Recommendations: Governmental Policy*

(1) At the federal level small private liberal arts colleges are likely to benefit more from expansion of student-aid programs than from any other government policies. This is especially true with respect to BEOG (because of its emphasis on low-income students and slight bias toward low-tuition institutions) and SSIG, whose benefits flow through state programs, most of which target tuition, and thus are helpful to independent institutions.

(2) At the state level, development of student aid programs—especially those that accommodate somewhat high tuition levels and those having eligibility criteria accommodating middle-income students—will also benefit small private liberal arts colleges. Eligibility based solely on need, not academic achievement, will benefit institutions that are less selective than more prestigious private institutions. The ability of the private sector to hold its share of enrollment with public institutions in spite of price differentials demonstrates that perfectly equal price competition is not needed. What is needed is a reasonable balance between effective public and private tuition, and well-constructed student grant programs can insure this. Well-constructed student aid programs have: (a) adequate maximum amounts to be able to cover tuition up to the maximum of the "typical" (not most expensive) private institutions; (b) adequately flexible needs analysis so that students from middle-income families are not excluded; and (c) sufficient total appropriation so that all qualified students can benefit.

(3) Policies designed to bail out or artifically preserve specific insti-

tutions from closing are ill-advised. If state and federal policies are designed to enhance fair market conditions, "ad hoc" institutional aid should not protect the natural casualties from the operation of the market.

(4) Some programs of institutional aid may serve to endorse the survival approach, but intelligent institutional aid policies will attempt to enhance quality and service and preserve vital resources rather than to prop up failing institutions. The federal Title III program, for instance, has proved its value in assisting institutions as they move through periods of fiscal and programmatic adjustment.

(5) State planning and coordinating activities do not in all cases adequately involve and consider the role and needs of the private sector (Education Commission of the States 1977 (b)). In cases where they do, such as New York, Pennsylvania, and California, good public policy regarding the private sector appears to have resulted. Planning activity needs to look at: (a) the contribution and condition of the private sector; (b) its need for public financial support and the appropriate means for providing that; (c) appropriate mechanism for greater cooperation between public and private sector, and due consideration of one when decisions (such as new program development) are made in the other; (d) the conditions under which a public institution should be closed or a private institution allowed to close.

*Recommendations: Institutional Leadership*

(1) Balanced budgets are a preeminent leadership responsibility. Nonprofit institutions are not thereby pro-loss institutions, and the ability to husband resources and increased revenues is an essential element of educational leadership.

(2) Clear determination of objectives and adherence to traditional missions are likely to be the best policies.

(3) If the traditional mission is deemed no longer viable, the shift to a new mission must be planned and precise. Eclectic entrepreneurealism is likely to serve no one and sustain no institution over time.

(4) Many small institutions have surveyed their ability to continue the pursuit of their traditional missions and concluded they could not. In some cases, this rethinking has produced new emphases, and new programs, which are clear and well-planned. One such institution is Marylhurst College in Portland, Oregon (Andrew and Friedman 1976, Vol. II, p. III-1-10). The shift to programmatic emphases that respond to the needs of "new" clients (such as adults) or new

learning styles (such as part-time study) or growing career patterns (such as human service work) is appropriate. While some small institutions are making this shift with vigor and honesty, for others the effort may be purely promotional.

(5) Religious institutions must be honest about the retention or divestiture of their traditional goals. To represent traditional religiosity to the parents of prospective students, secular neutrality to a governmental agency, and laissez-faire religiosity to students is hypocritical.

In the final analysis, which small private liberal arts colleges will survive? Will it be sufficient for them to work at what they have traditionally done in a conscientious and honest way? Probably not. Higher education and its environment are changing rapidly. The demographic pattern is changing: high school graduates will decline in number in 1979, first-time degree credit enrollment is expected to decline in 1980 (Simon and Frankel 1976). The proportion of part-time students continues to increase. The relationship between work and education and the perceived value of education for work is changing. The economic returns of the college degree and the perception of those returns appear to have declined and adversely affect the rate of college-going among high school seniors. Student needs and expectations are changing as well as are patterns of college attendance.

In the midst of these and other changes, a college may either be able to reaffirm its dedication to a traditional mission and clientele or it may vigorously adapt to its understanding of changed conditions. But it cannot drift, it cannot ignore change, and it cannot expect survival to be externally guaranteed.

Those colleges that undertake to renew themselves within the context of a traditional mission, or to redefine that mission for themselves, deserve an environment that provides reasonable odds for survival. Fair, competitive conditions would provide those odds. The provision of student support through state and federal sources, and intelligent coordination of the two, would move the system of higher education toward that competitive equilibrium.

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